

Motorcycle helmet laws found effective

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A U.S. study suggests states not requiring motorcycle riders to wear helmets may be contributing to unnecessary deaths, hospitalizations and disabilities.

"Almost 9 percent of all U.S. traffic deaths are attributed to motorcycle riding," said Dr. Jeffrey Coben, director of the Center for Rural Emergency Medicine at West Virginia University. "In 2004 more than 4,000 people were killed in motorcycle accidents -- an 89 percent increase since 1997 -- and more than 76,000 were injured."

Coben and colleagues compared motorcycle injuries in states with helmet laws with those in states with little or no helmet regulation.

They found states without universal helmet laws reported a higher number of motorcycle crash victims hospitalized with a primary diagnosis of brain injuries: 16.5 percent vs. 11.5 percent in states with mandatory use laws. The in-hospital death rate among states without mandatory helmet laws was also higher -- 11.3 percent vs. 8.8 percent.

The study appears online in the "Articles in Press" section of the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

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